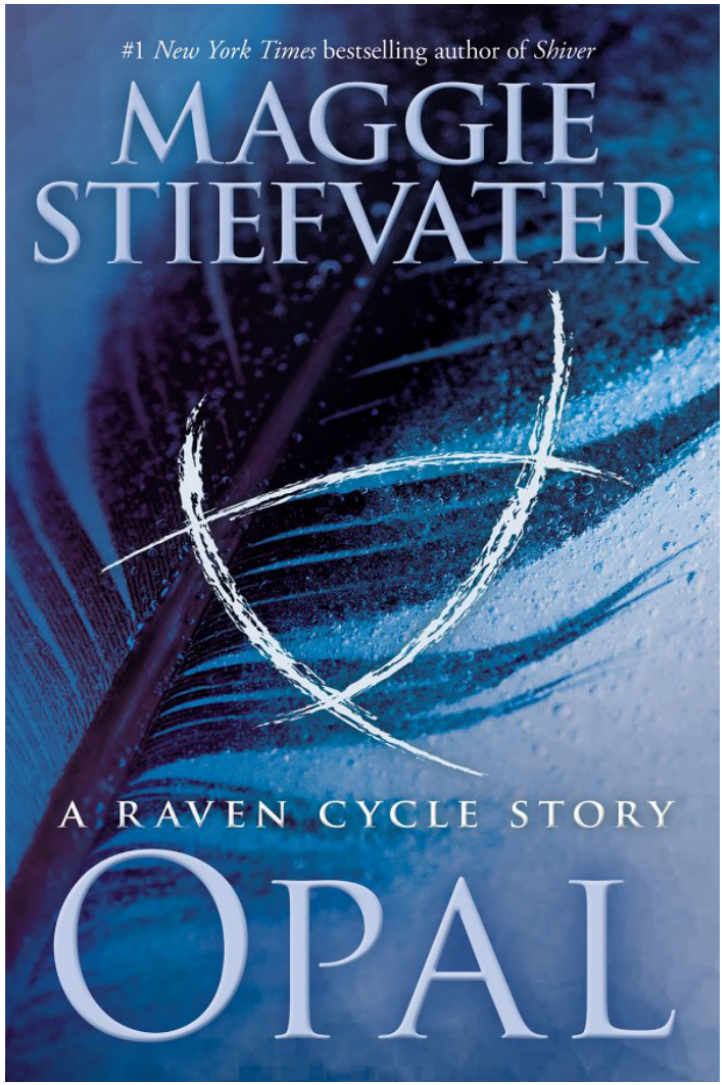
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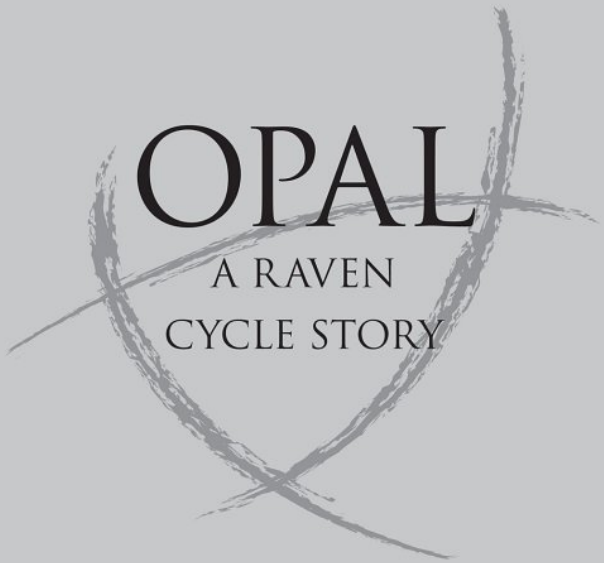
A RAVEN CYCLE STORY
OPAL



OPAL

A RAVEN CYCLE STORY

MAGGIE STIEFVATER

SCHOLASTIC INC.

For Sarah,
who gallantly took the Seat Perilous

These were the rules. Some visitors could see her, if Ronan said it was all right, and some visitors could not see her, if Ronan told her to make herself scarce, and no visitors were allowed to see her hooves.

She was not to eat anything that was inside the house unless it was given to her, even if it was something that sounded good while she chewed it, like cardboard boxes or plastic serving utensils, and in particular she was not to eat anything of Adam's or from Aurora's bedroom and if she did, she would be punished. She was not supposed to call Ronan *Kerah* because he had a name and she was perfectly capable of forming any word she liked, unlike Chainsaw, who only had a beak. She was allowed to climb on nearly anything except for the cars because hooves were not good for metal and also her hands were always very grubby. She did not have to take a bath or otherwise wash herself unless she wanted to come in the house, and she could not lie about having washed herself if she wanted to be allowed on a couch because *God, Opal, your legs smell like wet dog*. She was not allowed to steal. Hiding objects from other people counted as stealing, unless the objects were presents, which you hid but then laughed about later. Dead things were not to be eaten on the porch, which was a hard rule, because living things were also not to be eaten on the porch. She was not to run in the road or try to return to the ley line without someone with her,

which was a silly rule, because the ley line felt like a dream and under no circumstance would she willingly return to one of those. She was to only tell the truth because Ronan always told the truth, but she felt this was the most unfair rule of all because Ronan could dream himself a new truth if he liked and she had to stick with the one she was currently living. She was to remember that she was a secret.

Mostly it was all right, though, and Opal could do what she wanted around the Barns. Her only recent punishment had been because of the UPS man. She had been allowed to run out to greet him as long as she remembered to pretend that her name was *my little cousin from Syracuse* and also to never forget to wear the clumsy, tall boots Ronan had made her. The UPS man had very bright teeth and grew hair right on top of his face nearly over his mouth, hair that was longer than the hair on Ronan's head and nearly as long as the hair on Opal's legs. She had asked him once how she might get hair like that to grow on her own face and he had said "just keep trying," which she thought was very kind and encouraging of him. She still liked him a lot, but she was no longer allowed to greet him ever since she had crept into the cab of his truck to take the box of dog biscuits under the passenger seat and the photo of his wife taped up by his gearshift. She'd eaten the first in its entirety and had bitten the eyes out of the second.

"Well, that's fucked," Ronan had said, discovering the photograph after the UPS man had gone. "It's not like we can give it back to him. She's gone completely feral."

"She was never tame," Adam replied. "Only afraid."

Adam did not live at the Barns, much to Opal's disappointment. He was always kind to her and sometimes would show her how things worked and also she would have liked to sit in the dark room and watch him sleep.

But instead he came and went according to no schedule that she could discern. When he did sleep at the Barns, it was often during the day, when she felt certain she would be caught

spying. She had to content herself with stolen glimpses through cracked doors, slender one-inch views of duvet and sheets piled like thunderheads, Adam and sometimes Ronan pillowed among them.

Since the weather warmed, Adam's car sat in the driveway. Unlike Ronan's car, it rested on blocks instead of wheels, and he spent a lot of time underneath it or folded under its hood. Opal came to understand that Adam's car was supposed to be more like Ronan's, but there was something wrong with it called *shitbox*. Ronan kept offering to dream a cure for shitbox, but Adam was intent on fixing it "the right way." This seemed to be a long process, so Ronan's car was often missing, as Adam used it in his mysterious comings and goings. Sometimes Ronan left with Adam, and they didn't tell Opal when they would be back because they didn't know, they would be back when they were back, they were just going for a drive, don't touch anything in the long barn and try for God's sake to not dig any more holes in the front yard.

The long barn was not the longest barn in the secret rolling fields that stretched out around the old farmhouse, but it was the longest in relation to its width. It was surrounded by scrubby grass as coarse as the hair that covered Opal's legs, and also by cows that were always lying down but never being dead. (Sometimes she climbed on their wide, warm backs and pretended she was riding into battle, but they were about as much fun as the rocks that broke the fields up closer to the woods.) This was where Ronan kept all of his *current work* — which was what he called sleeping when no one was allowed to be near him. Ronan was always telling Opal not to interfere with the contents of the long barn, but there was no danger of her doing so. She could hear that the long barn was full of dreamstuff, and she was afraid of it.

Dreamstuff always sounded like a dream, which sounded like the ley line, which sounded a little bit like the electrical murmur you would hear under large power lines, which sounded like

when you walked into a room and the television had been left on but the sound was turned down. It was also a little like the thrum inside her that she could sort of hear-feel when she was lying quietly in the grass not-sleeping. Dreamstuff could be objects, like those left behind by Ronan's father in the outbuildings, but it could also be living things, like the deer Ronan had dreamt, or like Opal herself.

Ronan also sounded a little like dreamstuff, but it was not exactly the same as that of the dream creatures. He had an animalness to him, like Adam and the UPS man and the ladies who came and ate bread at the dining room table while pushing tarot cards around in circles and the man who once drove halfway down the driveway while Adam and Ronan were gone but then backed out and went away. Ronan was the only person Opal had ever known who had both animalness and the dreamstuff-fuzzy-noise. At first she thought this was just because she hadn't met very many people, but later she realized this was part of the reason why Ronan was also a little bit of a secret. Opal would have thought the sound of his dreamstuff would have tipped people off, but no one except for Opal and Adam seemed to be able to hear it. Adam was all animalness, no dreamstuff, but he seemed nonetheless tuned in to it.

"I can feel the ley line still," Adam had explained to the ladies with the bread when they had come over one night. Opal was playing a game called hide-her-hooves and she was winning it by standing in an empty flour crock that was positioned by the kitchen doorway. "I didn't think I'd be able to, now that I'm not tied to the line anymore."

"I was never tied to it," one of the ladies had replied, "and I've always felt it."

"But you're a psychic."

"Exactly."

Adam had laid out his words as carefully as they'd put down their cards on the table. "Am *I*?"

"Of course," one of the other ladies had said. "Did you think

you'd lost everything when Cabeswater died?"

"Yes," Adam had whispered, and Opal had felt a rush of love for him. She loved him the best when he was very sad or very serious or very happy. Something about his voice breaking filled her with feeling, and something about the vacancy of his expression when he was thinking hard felt like she was looking at a dream with nothing bad in it, and something about when Ronan made him laugh so hard that he couldn't stop made her love him so hard that she felt sad because one day he would get old and die because that was what things with animalness did.

Sometimes Adam would come with her when she was picking through the barns and sheds, and together they would sort through garden rakes and rusted motors and ancient bags of cow feed. Opal was looking for treasures that were good to eat or good to look at, but Adam was looking for dreamstuff. Opal was at once fascinated and terrified of these hunts. She could not stop herself from poking through piles of junk, knowing she might encounter a dreamthing by accident. When she did, she reared back with a delicious thrill of fear motoring her heart. It was not that these things were dangerous, although sometimes they were — she had found a small, ever-smoldering fire underneath an old tractor in one of the barns, and had discovered the hard way that it was hot enough to burn if you squeezed it very tight. It was that that dreamy humming was too right. Too much like herself, somehow, too truthful, too big. It reminded her of both the dreams she had come from and the nightmares that had nearly killed Ronan. It reminded her of being nearly unmade, black unmaking dribbling from her ears.

But it called for her. The things in the long barn, especially, where Ronan made new dreamstuff. The humming of these projects called to her more persuasively than any of the things that his father had dreamt. She did not care for this double-edged fear-desire. Most of her wanted *nothing* to do with dreams, and she resented that other, much smaller part of her, the part

that remembered where it came from and seemed to want *everything* to do with dreams.

Ronan had told her what he was working on in the long barn. He was making a new dreamplace like Cabeswater, like where she had come from, did she remember? Yes, she remembered the trees, the fearful trees, and she remembered the night horrors, and she remembered the black, bleeding ground.

"Not like it was at the end," he had said crossly, as if it had been any better before its dying moments. He had always been dying in his dreams, or getting small pieces cut off him, or being pitted against faceless gunmen. Nuclear bombs exploded in his hands and fish broke through windows to ruin sofas and myriad bodies showed up in myriad driveways. Not all of his dreams were terrible, but that made them collectively worse, not better. Opal was never prepared for when things would go wrong. She just had to be afraid all the time.

Ronan said, "Oh, don't make that face, runt. I'm not going to make you live there. Anyway, you might like it."

She would not like it. She was not going to go there.

Ronan and Adam spent more time than she liked discussing this new Cabeswater. It was hard to be a dreamer without it, it seemed, because the old Cabeswater had focused Ronan's dreams and had improved the control and power of the ley line, making sure that he dreamt what he meant to dream instead of something he called *pointless nighttime navel-gazing*. The ley line was the part that Adam was most interested in, causing him to use words that had edges to them like *conduits* and *efficiency* and *analogs*. Ronan was more interested in making it rain. He was very concerned with the concept of having an area in the new Cabeswater where it would always have that sort of rain that makes you feel happy and sad at the same time and also he was interested in having an area that did not suck. He seemed to regard this as his primary job, to dream of not sucking. Even though Opal thought Ronan was good at dreaming — after all, he had dreamt her, and she was excellent — he complained a lot

about this.

"I can't hold it all in my head at the same time," he'd said once. "What I want it to be. I can't make a new one without the old one to help me focus. What's the phrase for that?"

"Self-defeating," Adam had replied.

"Fuck you. *Catch-22*. That's what I meant."

"You dreamt the first Cabeswater without a Cabeswater."

"I just need it to not suck."

"I feel like there are more useful parameters. Like the amount of dream charge it could focus for you versus the amount of attention it draws."

"Good thought, Parrish. We need to dream you a new car, after all."

Opal, eavesdropping, had not quite followed the gist of the conversation — she was still better in the old dream language that waking Ronan never spoke — but she could tell that Adam liked it when Ronan talked like this. Sometimes they would stop talking and instead begin kissing, and Opal would eavesdrop on this as well. Her capacity for voyeurism was boundless and incorrigible. They were always coming together in surprising moments, going from easygoing to urgent in the space of a few breaths. She watched them kiss messily in the car in the driveway and she watched them tangle around each other in the laundry room and she watched Adam unbuckle Ronan's belt and slide his hand against skin. With intellectual curiosity, she watched ribs and hips and arms and legs and spines. She had no lust, because Ronan hadn't dreamt any for her, but she also had no shame, because Ronan hadn't dreamt any of that for her, either.

The only thing that had ever made her blink away was when Adam had once encountered Ronan in the second-floor hallway. Ronan had been standing outside of his parents' old room, one hand holding a cassette tape and the other clenched into a fist, and he'd been there for quite a few minutes by the time Adam climbed the stairs. Adam had taken the cassette from Ronan's

hand, working Ronan's fingers loose and putting his own fingers between them. For a moment Opal, hidden, had thought they were going to kiss. But instead, Ronan pressed his face against Adam's neck and Adam quietly put his head on top of Ronan's head and they did not move for a long time. Something about this made Opal burn so furiously that she could not stand to look a second longer. She left them there with a clatter so they would know she had been watching. Then she went out to rummage in the woods.

She had been doing this more and more since she had been taken from dreams. She thought of these roaming days as animal days. Animal days in an animal world. Unlike a dream, the animal world was strict. She liked this. The animal world had narrow rules, and once you learned those rules, it was much less surprising than a dream, which could change itself at any time. In the animal world, people could not suddenly fly. Faces did not move around to the back of skulls without warning. The fields around the Barns never shifted into an unfamiliar prairie or shopping mall before you could get to the driveway. Cars never turned into bicycles. Rainbows never fell out of cereal boxes and lava never poured from water taps. Dead things never became alive. Time marched in a boring and pleasant straight line. These were the rules that kept the animal world small and manageable.

This should have made the animal world more boring, but instead, it made her feel braver inside it. She ranged farther and farther from the farmhouse each week. She did not always go back when the sun went down. Instead she dug herself holes in fields and lay in them or made herself nests of stolen lawn furniture cushions. In this way she continuously expanded her territory without losing her way, sometimes making it to the far edge of the woods where there was a place that smelled like gasoline. She liked this place a lot. She liked to watch what people did when they did not think they were being watched. Sometimes they hit the 93 premium button and watched the 93 premium count numbers on a screen. Sometimes they wiped

down their windshields with a scented liquid that she wanted to drink. Sometimes they sat in their cars and cried softly. She liked this best of all, because it was rare, and she found she liked rare things the most.

Sometimes late at night when she risked stealing a drink out of the windshield-washing bins, a person would come to the door of the building and shout "What, what is that?" and she would have to scamper away behind the building, creeping and capering around the trash bins. On nights like these, she ran all the way back to the Barns with her heartbeat cluttered inside her because she was supposed to be secret and she was a little less secret than she'd been just a little while before.

Being spotted in such a way also reminded her that she broke the rules of this animal world. Outside of a dream, there were not girls with furry legs and hooves (although she thought there should have been, since both were very practical in the underbrush). Because of this, she was secret, and would forever have to be secret.

She sulked about this. She tore up a stack of vintage car magazines in the sitting room and sat in the ruins of them and when Ronan came home and demanded *what the hell is wrong with you like seriously*, she told him that she was bored of being secret.

He said, "Aren't we all!" Then he made her clean up all the damp, gummed paper, and then he made her wipe down the floor because some of the printing had transferred to the wood because of her spit, and then he made her take out the trash *plus* the kitchen trash without even letting her dig through it first. When she finally was done and angry instead of bored, he said, "I know you're bored. When I dream the new Cabeswater, it's going to be a way bigger and cooler place for you to play in. It's not going to be like just sticking around here."

Opal's heart frogged up her throat and escaped to the hallway. She shook her head and then shook it some more and then, because he didn't say anything, shook it some more.

“You might change your mind,” Ronan said.

She shook her head even more.

“You know, your head’s going to fall right off and it’ll be only your fault.”

This made Opal’s heart run even farther away before she remembered that in animal world rules, her head could not fall right off.

“It’s only going to get more boring. We’re not always going to be around, especially by the end of the year,” Ronan added. “Don’t just stare at me. You know what, go outside and dig a hole or something. And stay out of the long barn.”

She was not going into the long barn. And she was not going to change her mind. And it was not always boring at the Barns.

In fact, there was one day where it was very not boring.

Ronan and Adam were both gone in Ronan’s car, and a lady who Opal had not seen before came to the house. She was dark-haired and pale-skinned with furious light blue eyes that Opal at first thought were all white except for the pupil. Ronan was not there to tell Opal it was all right for this visitor to see her, so Opal hid herself and watched the lady stalk through the mist to the back door. The lady tried the doorknob and the doorknob shook its head no, but then she opened her purse and did something else to the doorknob and the door said yes and opened for her.

The lady stepped inside and Opal hurried to follow her. She could not go as fast as she liked because hooves were noisy on the wood floor, so she had to drop to her hands and knees to crawl. To her surprise, once she was close, she could feel that this lady had dreamstuff in her. She was not all dreamstuff — in fact, she seemed to be very little dreamstuff. She was mostly animalness. This was the first person Opal had met beside Ronan who shared both.

The lady took her time journeying through the halls, looking at photographs on the walls and opening drawers. She lingered at the computer where Ronan had been doing much of his work

those days when he was not driving his car in big muddy circles in the flat rear field. The lady clicked the mouse several times and then paged through the notebook filled with his handwriting that he used as a mouse pad. Opal did not know what it said because she had not learned to read and was not interested, but the lady seemed very interested. She took her time with it before moving to the next room.

Opal was filled with the anxiety that came from feeling she was meant to be preventing the lady from looking, but also with the anxiety that she was not meant to be seen. She wished Ronan and Adam would come back, but they did not come back. The lady went to Aurora's room where Opal was not allowed to eat anything, and she opened all the drawers and looked in all the boxes. To Opal's relief, the lady did not eat anything, but she did sit on the edge of the bed and look at the framed portrait of Ronan's father and mother for a long time. Her face did not seem to have an expression on it, but eventually, she told the portrait, "Damn you." That was a swear that Opal was also not supposed to say (but sometimes did, over and over again, to the sleeping cows, at a whisper, to see if the shock would wake them). Then the lady left the farmhouse and began to explore the garage and the other outbuildings.

As she got close to the long barn, Opal's anxiety growled higher and higher. Ronan was not home to stop this lady from touching or taking or eating whatever he had made in the long barn, and even if Opal was strong enough to stop her, Opal was meant to be secret. The lady strode through the damp field grass to the long barn, humming with her own dreamstuff, and Opal fretfully pulled handfuls of grass from the ground, warring with herself. She whispered for Ronan or Adam to return, but neither did.

For the first time, Opal was furious to be in the animal world instead of the dream world. In dreams, Ronan was always getting into trouble, and even though he often died, equally as often Opal saved him because she was an excellent dreamthing and a

psychopomp (which is the proper name for an excellent dreamthing). As a psychopomp, she could sometimes make the dream into something else, or convince Cabeswater to intervene on Ronan's behalf. Even if the bad dream was too intense for Opal to change it, she could still often rescue Ronan from harm by making things in the dreams do things they wouldn't have thought to do on their own. She could make a rock into a snake and throw it at a monster or she could make a sword out of some dirt or she could build Ronan's sadness into a raft when he was drowning in quicksand. There were no rules in dreams so you could try anything.

But the animal world was full of rules, and all of them were rules that made things smaller and more expected. Opal had no power here.

The lady tried to convince the doorknob of the long barn to say yes to her, but it did not agree with her as easily as the farmhouse door. Ronan had designed a dream object on the other side of it to make the door say no to as many people as possible, no matter what they might have in their purse. But this lady was both dreamstuff and animalness, just like he was, and Opal didn't know if that meant she might be able to get in eventually.

If only this were a dream, she could tug the edge of the field and shake it out like a blanket. She could scream the lady blind. She could clap her hands until a hole appeared for her to fall in.

But *rules*.

But wait.

With sudden inspiration, Opal realized she did have a way of shifting Ronan's dreams in this animal world. She ran up into the woods and she fetched all of Ronan's stags and does and badgers and foxes, all of them humming and singing like the ley line to Opal's ears, and then she herded them down through the fields. They galloped and pranced and careened down to the long barn. They were not easy to steer. When they lost their path, Opal had to bite at the larger animals' heels and kick at the foxes and

rabbits. They all made a terrible commotion. The lady looked up in time to see that she was going to be killed — Opal did not mean to kill her, of course, although on the way she had realized that it was a possibility and if it did happen, she had already decided where to bury her so that wildflowers would cover the hole. With a stiff, unpracticed run, the lady vaulted back to the driveway and slammed the car door behind her just in time for the smaller animals to hurl themselves over her hood and disperse.

Opal felt quite out of breath as her anxiety washed out, slowly replaced with victory. She had done it. She had really done it.

But then, terribly, the lady looked up from behind the wheel of her car.

This was not a dream day. It was an animal day. That meant that no one woke up when victory was achieved. The dream didn't vanish, the scenery didn't change, the curtain didn't go down. The lady was still there, and the creatures were still there, and Opal was still there, and so when the lady looked up, she was just in time to lock eyes with Opal where she stood among the milling herd. It had begun to rain a little, the sort of rain that made one happy and sad at the same time, all fast misty drops and silver moving light. Opal had lost one of her boots in the running, and even though her furry legs were mostly hidden by grass and the remaining boot, she was nonetheless prickled by the sense that this lady was looking at her and seeing the dreamstuff inside her, too. This was so against the rule, the rule of being secret, that she found she could not move, only bare her teeth nastily at the lady.

The lady drove away.

Opal never told Ronan or Adam about her. She was too humiliated to admit that she had been seen. It had been quite a lot of days since she'd gotten punished.

***

Opal superstitiously began to roam the days when Ronan and

Adam were gone. If she was not home to see it, she thought, no strange ladies would come back, and she would not have to decide whether or not to intervene. As soon as the car doors closed and the sound of the engine died, she would take off exploring. Sometimes she would go roaming even if Ronan was home, if he was locked up in the long barn where she could not see him.

She roamed at first to the gasoline-scented place, but after awhile, she discovered that the appeal wore off as she learned the rules of it. All of the sameness became boring and so she explored farther along the edge of the woods. There she found a new favorite thing to watch, which was a bench by a creek. It was a good creek, sharp-edged and black-watered and busy-flowing, with grass and moss growing right up to the lip of it and sometimes a fish or a plastic bag picturesquely floating in it, and the bench had been placed at a turn in it where the water sometimes turned over white and frothy. The bench was occupied by different people at different times and they were all right. But really her favorite was a person who returned again and again, always at the same time of day, except if it was raining. She was a fluffy, cloud-shaped lady with fluffy, cloud-colored hair, and she always came to the bench with a book and a food. The books were never the same book. They were fat and brick-shaped and the fronts always bore images of men who didn't seem to have any shirts or other possessions. Sometimes all they seemed to have was another man or sometimes a lady or sometimes both, who they held tightly. The foods were also never the same food. Sometimes they were things that made crunching sounds, short and fast, and sometimes they were things that made soft clucking sounds, and sometimes they were things that made no sound at all except for the cloud lady's satisfied "ahh" after she finished them. Opal enjoyed watching the foods and the books and the cloud lady's enjoyment of both. It felt a little bit like a dream, in the way that her happiness was so large that the feeling made it all the way across the creek to

where Opal was hiding. It was agreeable. It was a scene that she liked to return to often. Plus, the bench was close enough that she could return to the Barns each night without having to make a nest, which was convenient as it was raining nearly every evening.

On one of her trips back from watching the cloud lady, Opal encountered Adam. Shockingly, brilliantly, he seemed to be arriving at the Barns on foot. People did not come to the Barns on foot. They came by cars that would smash her flat and not feel bad about it so stay out of their way, according to Ronan. But here was Adam on just his legs, slowly coming into view through the mist rolling down the dark tunnel of trees out to the road. Opal was delighted to discover him traveling in the same way she did. She met him halfway down the long driveway and frolicked all around him as he put one foot in front of the other while the last of the late afternoon's light dappled over both of them. He said nothing as she grabbed his hand and then danced around to grab his other hand.

Ronan was less thrilled to discover Adam's inventive way of travel. "What the hell, Parrish? I was just about to leave to get you. Who dropped you off?"

"I walked."

"Ha ha." Ronan's real laugh did not sound like *ha ha*, but this was not Ronan's real laugh. When Adam didn't explain the joke, he said, "Walked. From where?"

"Work." Adam had ceased frolicking and instead removed his shoes and then his socks before sitting at the round table in the kitchen.

"*Work*. What. The. Hell. I told you I was going to pick you up."

"I needed to walk." Adam put his head on the table.

While Ronan ran tap water into a glass and set it on the table like he might be able to smash a hole through the wood with it, Opal climbed beneath the table to prod at Adam's bare feet. Legs that ended in feet were strange and interesting to her. Adam's

feet were long and hairless and vulnerable looking. His anklebone protruded like his wristbones did, as if his feet were just very strange hands. He had little bits of dark sock lint stuck to his skin, and it came off in a stripe when Opal rubbed at it.

"It's not the only place you applied," Ronan said, continuing an earlier conversation.

"But it was what I wanted the most. Opal, *stop*."

Ronan ducked his head under the table and caught her eye. "For God's sake. Get a jar and go outside and catch twenty fireflies. Don't come back in until you've caught twenty fireflies."

She went outside. There were a lot of fireflies in the waning light, but she was not good at keeping them in the jar while catching new ones, so it took her quite awhile. She did not go back inside when she was done, because by this time Adam and Ronan had come outside — Adam first, head down, walking fast, hands stuffed in pockets, feet still bare, not looking back, and then Ronan, pausing to jerk on his jacket before following Adam. Ronan called Adam's name twice, but Adam didn't turn or respond, even when Ronan caught up to him.

The two of them walked in silence up the dirt road to one of the barns in the upper fields, barely visible against the dark. The trees that surrounded the valley were already blacker than black.

"I might not get into any of them," Adam said. "It might have been for nothing."

"Whatever. Then you make a new list."

"You don't understand. I'd miss a semester unless I went for rolling admissions and that completely screws up the financial aid. Look, I don't expect *you* to care about this." Right after saying this, Adam said, in a different voice, "I'm being a shithead."

"You are. And a shitfoot. Where are your shoes?"

"Still under the table."

"Opal, could you get them for him?"

Opal could not, because it was too boring to go back to the

house when they were out here being exciting in the dark. What she *could* get them was that jar of twenty fireflies, which she released in Adam's face as she scampered by him. He reared back while Ronan enjoyed the scenery.

"She's so useful," Adam said. Opal preened.

"I know. Hold up." Ronan paused to kick off his own shoes and stuff his socks in them. Leaving them by the side of the track, he continued alongside Adam with matching bare feet. All of his dream creatures were slowly starting to assemble in the fields, more sound than sight in the darkness. Opal increasingly thought these animals were stupid. They were simple creatures, not as excellent as her. But Ronan seemed to like them anyway. Opal was a little worried that they would tell Ronan about the lady they had chased but then she remembered that things didn't work that way in the animal world. In any case, when the creatures saw that Ronan didn't have any buckets in hand and that Opal was close, they remained at a distance, cropping the grass or rooting in the dirt.

Adam and Ronan only stopped walking when they got to the rearmost field. Adam was never there when Ronan went out to drive his car in circles there and he seemed surprised to see what Ronan had done to the landscape. He stared at the flattened grass and muddy tire tracks for a good long time without saying anything. Possibly he was feeling excluded. Opal had ridden with Ronan once when he drove in the field, not because she wanted to ride in the car, but because she didn't like being left out. The experience had been jostling and loud. The car complained the entire time, and the stereo sang along with electronic chirrups. Ronan had told her she was not allowed to ride with him anymore after she had been sick behind the passenger seat, but she found she didn't mind. She would rather be excluded.

"You'll get into one of the others," Ronan told Adam eventually. "You're not going to have to make another list. It won't be what you imagined, but it'll be just as good."

"Remind me of that later."

“Count on it.”

Adam looked a little less crumpled. He prodded a clod of mud with one of his bare toes. “Is the new Cabeswater going to have a place to do this?”

Adam wasn’t looking at Ronan and so he did not see the complicated expression that flitted across Ronan’s face, but Opal did.

“It’s going to be a one-stop shopping experience,” Ronan said. “I’m living the dream.”

This made Adam laugh, and then he let out a deep breath. He appeared a lot less crumpled now. They held hands and it all became less exciting. Opal waited to see if there would be any more raised voices or discussion of her usefulness, but they remained quiet until they turned back around to return to the farmhouse. Then the only thing they talked about was how their feet were sore and dirty, which wouldn’t have been a problem if they had been made with hooves.

***

Summer arrived. Summer made things hot, and both Adam and Ronan smelled more in the summer, though they didn’t seem to notice or care. Ronan accidentally started a fire in one of the smaller outbuildings, and although this started out shouty it ended up wild and joyful, with both Adam and Ronan hurling things into it while music galloped in the background. Adam’s car got off the blocks and almost immediately returned to them. There were a lot of mice, which Opal enjoyed catching and occasionally eating. The cloud lady continued bringing books and foods to the bench by the creek and also began to bring a suitcase with tubes that went in her nose, which was interesting and made Opal stick things up her nose for a few days after she first saw it. Adam got one of the Lynch family’s old backhoes running again and dug a strategically placed hole out in one of the fields. A natural spring slowly began to fill it and an unnatural hosepipe finished the job; the boys stripped and leapt into the resulting body of water on the hottest of days. Opal did

not want to swim but Adam taught her until she was fearless, and then Ronan threw buoyant objects for her to fetch until he got tired of being on the shore. He had dreamt himself a pair of tattered black wings that did not quite hold him and he used them now like a temporary diving board, letting them lift him half a dozen feet over the water before dropping him with a muddy splash. Opal floated on her back and kicked her legs like Adam had shown her to do while the boys clung to each other in the water and then separated. The heat in the air made everything smell and look more like itself. Everything was very good.

Summer had animalness in it, though, just like a human, and so it too eventually had to die.

The end of the summer was good and bad. Good: Adam invented a ball game that used cricket wickets but that was better than cricket, and Ronan played it with her sometimes while smoke from the grill drifted past them and made Ronan's clothing smell delicious. Bad: Ronan and Adam had more and more conversations about whether or not they'd find the cure for shitbox before Adam went away for the fall and whether or not Adam should just take Ronan's car. Even though Opal went away herself plenty, she did not like the idea of Adam going someplace because he might get old and die without coming back. Good: Ronan spent less time in the long barn doing dreamstuff and instead spent time repairing other outbuildings and cleaning the house and typing away at the computer the lady had looked at, which meant Opal often got full days of him, only having to share with Chainsaw, who Opal resented hugely and sometimes daydreamed of eating. Bad: Twice Ronan got a phone call from his Ganseyfriend and both times he did not say anything to the phone, just listened to the ebullient patter on the other end and made grunting sounds in response. Both times after this Ronan went and lay down, once in his own room and once in Aurora's room; the first time, he was very quiet for a long time, and the second time he held his parents' photograph and cried a little

without making any sound.

By the end of summer, Opal could not remember the last time Ronan had been to the long barn. The dreamstuff sound in him was becoming a different one, a scratchy one, one she had heard long ago, back when she was still in a dream. Once Adam asked, "Are you going to do it before I go?" and Ronan answered, "Not if I can't get rain." Adam started to say something then instead said only, "be that way," and let it go. They went on more long drives and Adam stayed at the Barns more than ever, but Opal knew this was only because he was about to go away for a long, long time instead. She raged around and stole everything from the kitchen cabinets and buried all of it in the upper field where she had intended to put the dreamstuff lady's body if it came to that. When Ronan and Adam returned and told her this was unacceptable, she bit Adam and ran away.

She was filled with so much bad feeling that she didn't know what to do with herself. She wanted to make Ronan and Adam feel as badly as she did. She wanted to break rules. She wanted to break *anything*.

The long barn came into view before her, dark and hulking in the evening. As she made to skirt it, she was, as always both attracted and repelled by what it contained. Every evening before this one, the repulsion had won out. Tonight, though, she thought about the rule of not entering the long barn and she thought about how it was a very large, old rule, and it would be very noisy and satisfying to break.

She had half a thought that she might smash everything she found inside, too.

The long barn's door would not say yes to her, but a small window that wouldn't have fit a human did, so she slid inside.

She had expected it to be dark in here, and humming with dream energy, but it dazzled with small surprises of light tucked into corners and hovering near the ceiling, and any hum of dream energy was drowned out by the bellows of her anxious lungs and the hoofbeats of her anxious heart.

The floor was dirt. Tables were crowded with papers and glasses and musical instruments. A piece of art that she didn't like leaned against the wall. A door in the middle of the floor opened to reveal another door. A trap door hung open in midair, and on the other side of it was blue sky. Half a laptop was stacked on a phone the size of a cinder block. Opal touched nothing. Now that her heartbeat was a little quieter, the humming of the dreamthings rose to take its place. Fear wobbled inside her as she crept around and looked, her hands behind her back, her hooves scuffing dirt. This was too much like being in Ronan's head again. Raw and formless and without rules. Walking through these dreamthings was like walking through a memory, remembering the troubled country where she had grown up.

She could tell that Ronan had not been dreaming for a long time. All of these objects were weeks and weeks old. Nothing had the persistent, loud humming of the newly dreamed. There was mostly just the dull silence of an old barn, and in the background, a watery pattering. It called her more than everything else, and so she silently wound her way through the things until she found its source.

It was a large plastic bin. She could tell that the bin itself was not dreamstuff. Its contents were. Even from the outside, the contents felt happy and sad, enormous and small, full and empty. It was like the feeling of happiness from the cloud lady on the bench, but multiplied many times over, and she knew that the feelings themselves were dreamthings. Opal had forgotten the intensity of dreamstuff. She had remembered they didn't care about animal rules. But she had forgotten just how much.

She wasn't sure why she lifted the lid. She would have thought she was too afraid. Afterward, she thought that she had maybe done it *because* she was too afraid. Sometimes bad ideas were so bad they looped right around until they became good ideas.

Her fingers trembled as she set the lid aside.

Inside the bin, it was raining.

The rustling she'd heard was the sound of the rain misting the interior over and over, collecting into big drops on the plastic sides of the bin. Occasionally thunder rumbled, low and far away. The happiness and sadness Ronan had dreamt into the rain rolled over her, and she began to cry despite herself. This was the rain for new Cabeswater, and it had been here long enough for the lid to have dust on it. He had possessed it all along and it was never the thing stopping him from dreaming his new Cabeswater. Something else must have been stopping him. This knowledge made her even happier and sadder. The feelings grew and grew in her, the sadness slowly ebbing to leave only happiness.

It was maybe this, along with the humming of the dream things, that made her whisper, *"Ori! Si ori!"*

She had not spoken the dream language and expected an answer for a very long time.

But the dream in the box responded. The thunder muttered and the rain hissed, and the entire rain shower lifted from the box. It rained into the box from one foot above it, then two, then four. Then Opal lifted her hands and didn't say anything more in the dream language, just seized the rain and balled it up because she thought it would work.

It did; the rain wadded up like it was sticky, collecting into a dark clump that looked like a thunderhead.

She laughed and tossed it up in the air and caught it. When the clump bounced against the ceiling, it belched a burst of lightning that never left the cloud. She caught it with a little bump of happiness and sadness, and then she dropped it back into the bin. After a pause, she ripped off a tiny bit of the feathery wad and tucked it away in her sweater. It was okay to steal a little, she thought, because most of it was still left, and no one would know because she was not going to tell anyone she had broken the rule of coming in here. She was not going to smash the things in here. She was going to leave it like she found

it.

"Be rain, okay?" she whispered to it. The cloud dissolved back into Ronan's happy and sad rain, and she slapped the lid back on it. It had been so long since she had toyed with any dreamthings.

Opal clapped her hands and spun around, hooves scuffing in the dirt, and then she called out to the other dreamthings in the long barn.

Paper flapped to her like birds and she pinched their wings until they caught fire and then she pinched the fire until it became paper again. She smashed lightbulbs onto the ground and swept the shards into loaves of bread and then she tore the loaves open and pulled unbroken lightbulbs out of the middle. She floated on books and sang until dreamthings sang back to her. She played and she played with all of these dreamthings, knowing how to make them all do strange things, because she was an excellent dreamthing herself, and she had forgotten how wonderful a dream with nothing bad in it was.

Later Adam found her sitting at the edge of the forest. Above them the sun had slipped down behind trees and left behind knife-pink clouds. He sat beside her and together they looked out over the Barns. The fields were dotted with Ronan's father's sleeping cattle and Ronan's wakeful ones. The metal roofs sparkled with newness, all of them replaced by Ronan's new industry.

"Do you think you're ready to tell me where all the dishes are now?" he asked.

She had handfuls of grass in each palm, but no matter what she did to them, they stayed grass. This was what it meant to be in the animal world. Rules were rules. She felt pretty wobbly, like all of the fear that she hadn't felt in the long barn while she was playing had caught up to her.

"I'm coming back," he said.

She tore up some more grass, but she felt a little less wobbly having heard him say it.

“I don’t want to go, but I do — does that make sense?” he asked her. It did, especially if she thought about how some of her dreamthing’s happy-sadness might have rubbed off on him because they were sitting so close. “It’s just that it’s finally starting. You know. Life.”

She leaned against him and he leaned against her, and he said, “God, what a year.” He said it with such human feeling that Opal’s love for him overwhelmed her, and so she finally gave in and took him to where she’d buried all the dishes.

“This is a big hole,” he said, as they gazed into it. It was. It was big enough to bury a trespasser or a dinnerware set for twelve. “You know, I used to think you were going to get bigger. But I think you’re full grown, aren’t you? This is the way you are.”

“Yes,” Opal said, in English.

“Sometimes the way you are is a real pain,” he added, but she could tell he said it fondly.

It felt like it was going to be okay.

***

But it was not okay.

The first thing that went wrong was the cloud lady.

Opal had not been to the bench in several days because Adam and Ronan had both been home and she didn’t want to waste any minutes when they were home. But then Adam went to *I can’t believe he can’t just do the job himself fine I’ll be back* and Ronan started working on the computer in a boring way so Opal went roaming.

It was the wrong time of day for the cloud lady, far too late, but Opal went there anyway, because she missed watching her. By the time she thrashed through the trees to the bench, the air was dim and the creek was all-black, no-white, and it sounded louder than it did during the day. The grass all looked gray and black and the moss also looked gray and black and the bench also looked gray and black. The only thing that was not gray and black was beside the bench on the ground. It was white and

cloudy.

When Opal realized that it was the cloud lady, she cried out in the dream language before she could help herself. It was just that the image in front of her was so wrong that it felt like a nightmare.

But it was not a nightmare, it was the animal world.

Opal hesitated on the other side of the bank for several long minutes, waiting to see if the cloud lady would stop being a white blob beside the bench, reminding herself that she was a secret and had to remain a secret.

But the cloud lady remained a white blob. Opal stomped her hooves and then growled a little and finally leapt over the creek. She crept slowly to the cloud lady but she knew right away that she did not have to worry about being quiet. There was no animalness to the cloud lady anymore. There was only a little bit of a bad smell and a box of crackers collapsed beside her. Opal checked it for crackers, but they had all been eaten, though she didn't know if the cloud lady had eaten them or squirrels had.

She touched the cloud lady's hair, which she had always wanted to do, and then she touched the tubes going into her nose, and then she touched her cloud body. It was not as soft as it had looked from a distance. It was pretty solid. Pretty real.

Opal began to wail. She rocked back and forth beside the cloud lady's body, and she clutched her own cap and pulled it down over her ears and eyes, and she let out the piercing, raucous shrieks Ronan had told her not to do now that she was outside of a dream. Adam had once said they were so loud that they could wake the dead, but they didn't, not when put to the test. This was the animal world, and dead things couldn't be living again here. It wasn't like when Ronan was killed again and again in his dreams. The cloud lady wasn't going to be reset and reappear on the bench again the next time Opal came.

Opal hated this small animal world and all its small, limiting rules.

She wailed and wailed until she heard noises in the woods,

voices rising, other humans, still full of animalness. She retreated across the creek to her hiding place. She wanted to wait to see what would happen to the cloud lady's body, but she knew it would be harder to slip away once the others were close. And it wasn't like there were many options for what would follow. They might eat the cloud lady or they might take her away but they would not do the thing Opal wanted, which was to make the cloud lady an animal again.

So she slid back through the trees, crying and wailing in her own head, until she was back at the Barns. Fireflies winked by her as she waded through the grass, but she didn't have the heart to catch any. Instead she stumbled right up to the back porch, and to her surprise, she found Ronan already there.

He hadn't turned on the back porch light and so he was just another pillar holding up the roof until she got up close to him. The dreamstuff in him was unpleasantly fuzzing the same static it had been doing for weeks, and his face was cast in gray evening light and she didn't like how he did not look exactly like himself, but she didn't care enough to not walk right up to him and hug his leg.

Ronan let her cling to him for a minute, his hand on her head, and then he said in a low voice, "Opal, could you get Adam? He's working on his car."

When she didn't move because Adam's car was only just around the front of the house and so Ronan could just go there himself, he repeated himself in Latin. This was strangeness because he sounded like an old sort of himself, the sort of him that she would have spoken to in a dream, where there were things that might kill them both. But this was not a dream; it was the real chipped-paint back porch of the real farmhouse.

Adam was fetched. As he rounded the corner of the yard, he called out to Ronan, "Opal's got a bee in her bonnet, or however you say it. She wouldn't let it go. Did you actually send her?"

"Parrish," Ronan said. "There's—" He lifted his fingers to reveal that they were smeary with black, like black paint. No,

not like black paint. Like the opposite of white paint.

"What—" said Adam.

Opal caught the noise of the stuff a second after she saw it. It was a sound that was not-a-sound, a sound that sucked in the precise sound of the ley line and canceled it out. It was nothingness and unmaking, and she remembered it from the nightmare of the fall before. It was the thing that had almost destroyed her and Ronan, a monster with no real name. Fear began to rocket up from her hooves to her cheeks, all of her going cold and shivery.

Adam asked, "Did you dream it?"

Ronan shook his head, and as he did, a thin dribble of that same black escaped from one of his nostrils.

It was coming out of him. The last time this had happened, it had come out of him and out of him and out of him while he twitched in a car, and it had come out of Opal while she huddled in the same car. It had been killing him, impossibly and terribly, like in a dream, only he had been awake. The unsound of it combined in Opal's mind with the smell of the cloud lady's body. This was too much, and it shut down every reasonable thought inside her.

Opal began to scream, high and squalling. Chainsaw flapped her wings and began to scream as well. Their voices mingled, inseparable and identical, and truth wailed out as well, that they were both dreamstuff no matter how animally they felt, they were both Ronan's dreamstuff, and most of what made them different was only details, and most of what made them the same would die if Ronan died. This was horrifying and too big to think about as it had always been, and so she could not stop screaming.

Her scream and her fear were so loud that she could not seem to see at the same time, and so it was with confusion that she found herself outside alone. It was only after she retroactively considered the memory that she remembered Adam brusquely taking Ronan by the arm and shutting the door between her and

them.

Chainsaw had been exiled as well, and she was still mewling and flapping pitifully. Opal aimed a kick at her (Chainsaw hissed back) and then tried the doorknob.

She had not been locked out, but she didn't know if she wanted to go in. She did not know if she was more afraid *for* him or *of* him.

After an argument with herself, she crept-crawled into the house. She did it the way she had when the lady invaded, on her hands and knees, making no sound, skulking down the hall. If she were in a dream, she would have made herself sort of invisible. She could do that sometimes. There was no reason why the blackness coming out of Ronan would care if she was visible or not, but it felt safer to be as secret as possible. Chainsaw scuttled after Opal, not fond, but preferring her to solitude and uncertainty. Opal listened for their voices until she found that they were in the kitchen, and then she and Chainsaw crouched just outside the door, her fingers hooked into knots in the old wooden floor. She could clearly hear the static in Ronan's dreamsound.

"I'm not going if it doesn't stop," Adam said, and Opal's heart exploded with gladness. She imagined an autumn where Adam's car stayed on blocks and nothing ever changed.

"Fuck that," Ronan replied. "You're going."

"You must really think I'm a monster."

"Don't even start. Shit. Could you—"

"God."

"God won't get me a towel."

Adam thumped by Opal and Chainsaw without seeming to even notice the two of them huddled by the door, and then he thumped back down the exact same way. Ronan's dreamnoise hitched. Chainsaw rapidly tapped her beak open and shut and Opal aimed a fist at her to quiet her.

"Why is this happening?" Adam asked.

"I was hoping you'd tell me." Ronan's dreamnoise fuzzed and

burned in Opal.

"How would *I* know?"

"You know everything."

"I don't — maybe I should call Fox Way." But Adam sounded dubious.

"Because that worked so well last time."

Happiness and sadness were rising up in Opal, both at once. Now that she was not screaming, she knew what was causing the reappearance of the dark unmaking. Because even though she now would have preferred to be properly animally, she was still made of dreamstuff. Moreover, she was not just dreamstuff, she was excellent dreamstruff, a psychopomp, designed to save Ronan again and again, ever since he was a little boy. She knew what she sounded like as a dreamthing, and she knew what the ley line sounded like as a dreamsource, and she knew what Ronan was supposed to sound like as a dreamer. She knew it in the way that she knew all the time that she was a piece of him, a manifestation of a part of him. It was this terrible trueness that had drawn her to other things like her at the same time that it drove her away.

So she could save him now.

But if she stopped the black-oozing present, she would have an Adamless future. He had just said it: if it didn't stop, he wouldn't go away.

Ronan abruptly strode past her and Chainsaw, filled with such brisk purpose that both she and the bird reared back. But he didn't pause; just opened the front door and went outside. Adam, Opal, and Chainsaw all hurried to follow him.

The three of them stood in the dull, friendly light of the porch and watched Ronan. He was not on the porch. He was next to his car, which was on its wheels next to Adam's car, which was on its blocks, and he had all the doors open. The little interior light looked like the single shining eye of some kind of creature, and it winked sometimes as Ronan moved back and forth in front of it. He was harvesting trash from his car, which he did very rarely —

more often Opal would have to do it as a punishment — and placing the papers and wrappers into a bag. Opal did not understand why he was doing such a thing with such furious import. He never ate the trash harvest. Surely he couldn't really believe the trash harvest would help him with the unmaking. But he continued to rip great handfuls of paperwork from its roots before stuffing it into a Food Lion bag.

"Come on, Lynch," Adam said.

Ronan retrieved a receipt as it danced and twirled across the driveway. They were delicious, but sometimes the edges gave Opal a paper cut on the corners of her lips if she put them in her mouth the wrong way. He stuffed it into the bag. "Sometimes I don't even know if I'm a real thing. Why isn't there anyone else like me?"

"Your dad. Kavinsky."

"I meant living people. Unless the takeaway is that we're all just really good at being dead."

"Ronan. What the hell are you even doing?"

Ronan put a soda bottle in the bag. "What does it look like? Cleaning the car before you take it. I just want you to go, tonight."

Adam laughed, but it was a laugh that sounded like punching air. "It's like you want it. It's like some part of you always wants it."

Ronan rummaged in the trunk, which was a part of the car Opal had been forbidden to harvest from. She had tried to guess what might be in there, thrilling herself with the most terrifying and terrible of options (her favorite was that there was another Opal in there). She couldn't see what was in it now, but it was making a chattering, metallic sound. "That's not true."

"It's like you don't care if it happens, then. It's like you're never afraid."

The noise in the trunk stopped. Ronan said, "You already knew that part of me got fucked a long time ago, Parrish, and it's not changing anytime soon."

Adam crossed his arms. He was getting very upset, and Opal's heart was bursting with love for him, and when she held on to him, he didn't push her away. "Well, that's not okay with me."

"Luckily for you, looks like that isn't going to matter." Ronan threw his car keys in the direction of the front porch. They clattered and slammed against the topmost stair, where they remained. Ronan was often losing his car keys by putting them in stupid places, and Opal thought about how this was just another stupid place because no one would think to look on the front porch stair for the keys.

Adam turned away and just looked at the front door as if it were the most interesting thing. It was not, so Opal turned back to Ronan, who sank down into the passenger seat of the car and let his harvest bag rest on the ground. Black was running out of his ears and soaking his collar, and between his parted lips his teeth were coated in it.

They both smelled very afraid, but neither of them said anything more. The car was chiming the single first note of a song but never getting any further.

She couldn't bear this. She called out, *"Kerah Kerah Kerah!"*

She clattered over to him, her hooves kicking up gravel. Ronan turned his face away, but she had already seen all the unmaking he was trying to hide from her.

"Not now," Ronan told her. "Please."

But there was only now. This was not a dream where Ronan would reboot and dream again, no matter what happened. This was the animal world, where the cloud lady died and stayed dead. And Adam, who could solve many things with animal solutions, would never fix this one. It was a dream problem.

Which meant it had to be her.

"Dream," she told him. She didn't like to look at him the way he looked now, with black on his teeth and coming out of his eyes and ears, but she had seen him worse in a dream before. She sat on the driveway in front of him.

He didn't look at her still.

“Dream,” she said again.

When he didn’t answer her, she reached into her sweater. She didn’t like to do this, because she did not want to be punished. She would be punished for going into the long barn when she was not supposed to, but if she had to choose — and she was being forced to — she would rather be punished than have Ronan die for good and then die herself.

She took out the little bit of the furry rain cloud that she had stolen from the long barn. She squeezed it a few times until it turned back into rain, and then she held her palm out in front of him so the drops skittered over her skin.

Happiness and sadness washed over them as thunder pressed against their ears.

The stairs creaked as Adam joined them. He crouched beside Opal. “I thought you said you couldn’t do the rain. I thought that was why you hadn’t done it yet.”

Ronan replied sullenly, “I could.”

“I don’t understand, then.”

“Dream,” Opal said urgently. She was annoyed that they were not instantly accepting her solution.

Ronan wiped his face on his shoulder. It just made both smeary. “I can’t make it as good as the old one.”

Opal was so angry that she picked up his bag of harvesting and hurled it away from her. Half its contents gladly escaped and flew across the yard before being caught in the grass. He never tried to hold conversations while dying in his dreams. *“Dream!”*

“Is that why you stopped?” Then Adam seemed to put things together, in the way that he always seemed to know when something was a dream thing, and he turned to Opal. “That’s why this is happening, isn’t it?”

“Vos pot—” she began, and then restarted. “You can’t stop dreaming. Dreamers *dream*. Or this.”

“No,” Ronan said. “No, I’ve stopped before.”

Adam asked, “For this long? On purpose? Nothing dreamed accidentally? It’s been all summer, hasn’t it? When was the last

time you dreamed something?"

It was too complicated of a thought to convey in English, but Opal thought to herself how it didn't matter how long it had been, anyway. Dreamtime didn't work the same way as animal time, she had discovered, and so unlike animal time, with its absolute rules and soldierlike march forward, dreamtime could suddenly run out because it seemed like it ought.

"All this is because you were trying to make the new Cabeswater perfect?" Adam asked.

Ronan leaned back across the center console and snatched the driver's side door. He slammed it shut and the chiming of the car finally stopped. "What is the point otherwise?"

"Do you remember what you told me next to your mudpit? I told you to remind me. 'It's not going to be what you imagined, but it'll be just as good.'"

Ronan sighed. He closed his eyes. "I liked it better when I said it."

"I'll bet."

"I'm supposed to dream something right now?"

Opal was glad to see he was slowly turning his ship toward the shore of solutions. She seized his hand and flapped it. "*Yes.*"

Not opening his eyes, Ronan asked, "What am I dreaming?"

Adam's relief rained out of the cloud of his voice. "Dream me a fix for the shitbox so I can go and so I can come back. And then dream up a new Cabeswater. It doesn't have to be like the other one. Just as good as you can make it."

The happiness and sadness rose up in Opal, even though she had misplaced the tiny bit of dreamrain that she'd stolen. It might have just been her own happiness and sadness, over things going well and badly at the same time, over Adam going away and Ronan being saved and Adam coming back again. It was funny how a dream really just contained the absolute best and absolute worst parts of the animal world. She'd been so afraid of the absolute worst that she'd forgotten how she missed the absolute best.

She was no longer afraid of the promise of a new Cabeswater. She was ever so much more excellent when she was in a dream.

"Yes," Opal said. "Because I want to go home."

About the Author

Maggie Stiefvater is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of the novels *Shiver*, *Linger*, *Forever*, and *Sinner*. Her novel *The Scorpio Races* was named a Michael L. Printz Honor Book by the American Library Association. The first book in The Raven Cycle, *The Raven Boys*, was a *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year and the second book and third books, *The Dream Thieves* and *Blue Lily, Lily Blue*, were ALA Best Books for Young Adults. She is also the author of *Lament: The Faerie Queen's Deception* and *Ballad: A Gathering of Faerie*. She lives in Virginia with her husband and their two children. You can visit her online at www.maggiestiefvater.com.

Also by Maggie Stiefvater

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Blue Lily, Lily Blue
The Raven King

The Scorpio Races

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